

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

ACDA-07 OMB-01 IO-13 EB-07 /084 W

----- 129156

R 030222Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 379

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 19200

FOLLOWING MSG SENT ACTION BANGKOK INFO VIENTIANE FROM UDORN  
3 JUL IS REPEATED TO YOU FOR INFO:

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L UDORN 5447

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR, TH, LA

SUBJ: THAI OFFICIAL IN NAKHON PHANOM FAVOR REOPENING LAO BORDER

1. IN RESPONSE TO RECENT PRESS SPECULATION (BANGKOK POST, JUNE 28) THAT THE THAI GOVERNMENT IS READY TO REOPEN THE BORDER WITH LAOS, CONSULATE POLITICAL ASSISTANT VISITED OFFICIALS IN THE BORDER PROVINCE OF NAKHON PHANOM (NKP) IN ORDER TO GAUGE UPCOUNTRY SENTIMENT TOWARD THE PROPOSED MOVE. HE REPORTED THAT THE MODD AMONG PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES IN BOTH NKP CITY AND IN MUKDAHAN IS DECIDEDLY IN FAVOR OF OPENING THE BORDER AT SELECTED CROSSING POINTS.

2. THE REASON MOST OFTEN CITED IS ANTICIPATED ECONOMIC BENEFIT FROM A REVIVAL OF THE TRADITIONAL CROSS RIVER TRADE WITH LAOS. THERE IS A STRONG BELIEF IN NKP THAT ONCE THE BORDER OPENS, THAI VENDORS AND MERCHANTS WILL FIND AN EAGER MARKET FOR STAPLE ITEMS LIKE SUGAR, SALT, MEAT, RICE AND GASOLINE. IN EXCHANGE,  
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THAI IMPORTERS EXPECT TO DO A BRISK BUSINESS IN LUMBER, COFFEE,

AND OTHER RESOURCES FROM LAOS.

3. OFFICIALS ALSO EXPECT A BORDER REOPENING TO LEAD TO:

- A) A REDUCTION IN SMUGGLING ONCE TRADE BECOMES LEGAL;
- B) AN INCREASED FLOW OF INFORMATION THAT WILL PERMIT BETTER INTELLIGENCE GATHERING ON INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LAOS; AND
- C) BETTER STATE TO STATE RELATIONS WITH LAOS WHICH WILL REDUCE VIETNAMESE INFLUENCE ALONG THAILAND'S NORTHEASTERN BORDER.

4. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE THERE IS SOME CONCERN THAT A) BROADENED CONTACTS COULD LEAD TO CHRONIC DISPUTES AT THE CHECKPOINTS, THEREBY INCREASING THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE AND CRISIS ALONG WHAT HAS BEEN, IN RECENT MONTHS, A RELATIVELY QUIET BORDER; AND B) THAT AN OPEN BORDER WOULD INVITE GREATER COMMUNIST INFILTRATION INTO THE NORTHEAST.

5. PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED INSTRUCTIONS TO PREPARE FOR REOPENING THE BORDER. HOWEVER, AN AIDE IN THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE SAID THAT WHEN THE DECISION IS MADE THEY PLAN TO OPEN THE BORDER AT THE FOUR MOST LOGICAL CROSSING POINTS IN THE PROVINCE: THA UTEN, NKP CITY, THAT PHANOM, AND MUKDAHAN.

6. COMMENT: APPARENT OPTIMISM ON THE PART OF OFFICIALS IN NKP PROVINCE OVER PROJECTED ECONOMIC GAINS FROM REOPENING THE BORDER, WHILE PERHAPS SUBJECT TO QUESTION IS NOT SURPRISING. LAST YEAR THE ECONOMY OF NAKHON PHANOM SUFFERED THE TWIN SHOCKS OF THE BORDER CLOSURE WHICH CUT COMMERCIAL TIES TO NEIGHBORING LAOS AND THE END OF THE ERA OF THE SUPERBAHT WHEN THE U.S. AIR FORCE PULLED OUT IN OCTOBER. ALTHOUGH A FEW TOWNSMEN STILL CLING TO THE HOPE THAT FREESPENDING G.I.S WILL ONE DAY RETURN TO THE "CAMP", IT APPEARS THAT GREATER NUMBERS ARE COUNTING ON A RESTORATION OF THE ONCE FLOURISHING TRADE ALONG THE MEKONG RIVER TO LIFT THEIR CITY OUT OF ITS ECONOMIC DOLDRUMS.  
HENDRICKSON  
UNQUOTE  
WHITEHOUSE

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** FOREIGN RELATIONS, BORDER CONTROLS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 03 JUL 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** vogelfj  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1976BANGKO19200  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D760258-0497  
**From:** BANGKOK  
**Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
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**Line Count:** 98  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION EA  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 2  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** vogelfj  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <28 MAY 2004 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <21 SEP 2004 by vogelfj>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** THAI OFFICIAL IN NAKHON PHANOM FAVOR REOPENING LAO BORDER  
**TAGS:** PBOR, PFOR, TH, LA  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006